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STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COOPERATION

Report of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Industrial and Construction Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Industrial and Construction Statistics (Convener: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)) which is contained in the annex. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of its Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its sixteenth session (Geneva, 13-16 September 1993) (E/CN.3/1994/2, para. 11).

* E/CN.3/1994/1.

Annex

REPORT OF THE INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE ON INDUSTRIAL AND CONSTRUCTION STATISTICS

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I. COMPOSITION OF THE TASK FORCE

1. The membership of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Industrial and Construction Statistics consists of several international agencies: OECD (Convener), the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat (UNSTAT), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat). Three countries have also volunteered to help the Task Force in its work: Canada, Italy and the United States of America. The World Bank and the United Nations regional commissions have not participated in meetings of the Task Force for financial and other reasons but have expressed interest in the work of the Task Force and have been kept informed of its progress.

II. MANDATE

2. When dealing with issues of data collection, "industry" is to be construed narrowly, i.e., as mining, manufacturing and public utilities. However, "industry" should be construed broadly when discussing the implementation of the third revision of the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC, Rev.3). The Task Force will not address "construction" in the current phase of its work. The Working Group may reassign that responsibility or review the mandate of the Task Force later.

3. The Task Force affirmed that the implementation of ISIC, Rev.3 - not the further revision of the ISIC - was within its mandate. It noted that the lack of conversion keys from ISIC, Rev.2 to ISIC, Rev.3 was a major impediment to that task. Intercountry comparisons have become increasingly difficult and the widespread adoption of a truly international classification would be the most effective remedy.

4. The Task Force has two overriding goals:

(a) To review and recommend ways of improving the international comparability of industry statistics;

(b) To agree on whatever measures are required to reduce duplication in, streamline and better coordinate the collection, compilation and dissemination of industry statistics.

5. The Task Force adopted as an additional agenda item the systematization of knowledge about the users and uses of industry statistics, with special emphasis on the policy issues that industry statistics are designed to inform.

III. ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE AND PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

6. The Task Force adopted as the first task on its agenda the taking of a survey on country practices and intentions with respect to ISIC, Rev.3. That survey is intended to complement a similar survey taken by UNSTAT, which was

discussed at the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission and found to be lacking in a number of important respects.

7. The questionnaire for the survey of country practices and intentions was pilot tested using a subjectively selected representative sample of countries. The inquiry itself was sent to approximately 100 countries, which are generally respondents to UNSTAT inquiries on industrial statistics. The analysis of the survey will be the subject of the next meeting of the Task Force, which will be held in March 1994. A supplementary report on that meeting will be submitted to the Statistical Commission.

8. In principle, questions need to be asked of only a sample of countries. However, some questions can best be answered by personal visit, probably in conjunction with other missions. A list of those questions has been drafted and interviews will begin following the analysis of survey results.

9. Members of the Task Force have begun a summary of the uses and users of industry statistics for eventual transmission to the Statistical Commission; a set of questions for international organizations will be based on that summary.

10. The Task Force has encouraged the development and dissemination of a set of concordance tables and other materials needed to facilitate the implementation of ISIC, Rev.3. Two items are in progress at UNSTAT: (a) a computerized correspondence table between ISIC, Rev.2, ISIC, Rev.3, the third revision of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC, Rev.3), the Harmonized System (HS) and the Provisional Central Product Classification (CPC); and (b) a detailed table of correspondence between ISIC, Rev.2 and ISIC, Rev.3, which is not currently computerized. UNSTAT has agreed to announce that the detailed correspondence table in item (b) will be available through the regional commissions by January 1994, while the computerized correspondence tables in item (a) will be available by July 1994. A few modest aids that will guide the transition from ISIC, Rev.2 to ISIC, Rev.3, such as handbooks and curricula for workshops, could also be developed.

IV. CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA OF GENERAL INDUSTRIAL STATISTICS

11. The Task Force noted that, in accordance with the recommendation of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-seventh session, UNIDO, in collaboration with OECD, would assume responsibility for the collection and dissemination of world-wide general industrial statistics, effective 1994. UNSTAT has forwarded to UNIDO all related technical materials, including copies of general industrial statistics questionnaires and a computer system manual, as well as information used to facilitate communications with national statistical offices. During the present transition period, UNSTAT has sent out the 1992 edition of the general industrial statistics questionnaires to non-OECD countries. Those questionnaires, when returned to UNSTAT, will be forwarded to UNIDO for processing and dissemination. OECD will collect the general industrial statistics data for its member countries and will share those data with UNIDO. UNSTAT has also agreed to continue the collection and dissemination of general industrial statistics on mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water for

non-OECD countries for the next few years, until UNIDO is able to assume full responsibility for the functions of their collection and dissemination. UNSTAT will continue to collect and disseminate data on the index numbers of industrial production.

V. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

12. The Statistical Commission may wish to:

(a) Comment on the achievements and the prospects for future success of the Task Force;

(b) Review and suggest ways of improving the international comparability of industrial statistics;

(c) Discuss aspects of industrial statistics, including the uses and users of industrial statistics;

(d) Endorse the mandate of the Task Force.